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ABSTRACT

The Native American's daily life was a walk with supernatural happenings, directed by the power of the Great Spirit. An important experience for a young man was the vision-search. Fortunate youths had a personal encounter with the Great Spirit and received evidence of a special ally or spirit-brother. At the same time, the individual might receive special power or insight affecting the role he played in relation to his tribe. "The Vision of the Spokane Prophet" retells a legend of the Spokane tribe, in which a prophet went to their sacred mountain and experienced a vision of the future coming of the white man. The legend was told by Quellquellitzah, a Spokane leader, to his daughter, who told it to the poet. The poet recorded the legend in free verse, attempting to recapture the poetic rhythm of the Spokane storyteller. Each page has an illustration by Tanya Hardgrove. (SV)

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THE VISION OF
THE SPOKANE PROPHET

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by
Rebecca A. Egbert

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The Vision of the Spokane Prophet

by
Rebecca A. Egbert

Illustrated by
Tanya Hardgrove

COUNCIL FOR INDIAN EDUCATION
517 Rimrock Road, P.O. Box 31215
Billings, Montana 59107, U.S.A.

This book is dedicated in memory of my beloved friend,
ELLA McCARTY
to whom I owe my interest in Indian history. It was my privilege, for over forty years, to hear the stories and sagas of her Spokane tribe, as only she could tell them.

It is my sincerest wish that others may experience the drama and excitement of the story as I have portrayed it in my epic poem, the way I experienced it when it was told to me.

Rebecca A. Egbert

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THE VISION

The Native American's daily life was a walk with supernatural happenings directed by the power of the Great Spirit. An essential part of this religious association was a deep respect for and harmony with nature itself.

One of the most deeply moving and life-inspiring experiences for a young man was the individual rite of the vision-search that affirmed his tranformation into maturity. The more fortunate youths had a personal encounter with the all-powerful Spirit and received evidence of a special ally or spirit-brother assigned to help him during the important times of this life. A certain animal, bird or object took on spiritual significance during this time as special proof of this gift and was cherished throughout his life as a personal token or totem.

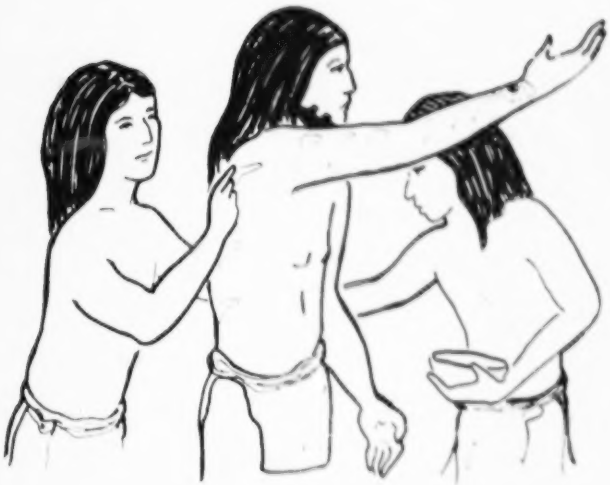
At the same time the individual might receive special power or insight that would determine the role he played in his relationship with his tribe.

The Vision of the Spoken Prohpet is a soul-stirring, dramatic poem, written in free verse, that transports the reader back to the moment the Prophet of the Spokane Tribe received hs vision of the future. It gives a vivid look at the event, as the prophet himself may have experienced it.

The legend was told by Quellquellitzah, a leader of the Spokane tribe, to his daughter, Ella McCarty, who told it to Rebecca Egbert, who recorded it in it's present form-a most appropriate form as it recaptures some of the poetic rhythm of the Spokane story teller.

Rebecca Egbert is president of Poetry Scirbes of Spokane, and a member of Spokane Christian Writers. Her poems and articles have appeared in a variety of magazines. She also writes devotional material for radio and has written training manuals for the handicapped. She has many years experience as a teacher and has had a life-long interest in Indian people and Indian history.

The Vision of the Spokane Prophet



The prophet lifts
burnished arms
as brothers paint
naked body
ritual colors:
smear
belly, rump, legs.
Cheeks are streaked, ribboned.

The prophet takes
sacred pouch,
sticks;
walks slowly,
shoulders straight,
head erect,
eyes forward.

Walks toward
the sacred mountain;
brothers leave him,
prophet climbs, alone,
to mountain top.

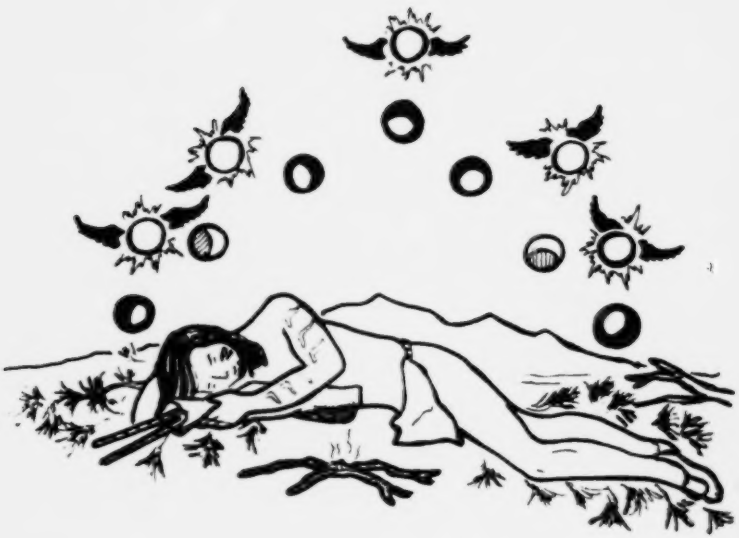
The prophet raises
sticks skyward,
points each toward
wind-point.
West, North,
East, South
he faces, calling
wind-spirits
to witness.

He squats to kindle
campfire;
sticks rubbing, turning.
Sparks catch twigs,
bark smokes, cracks,
flares.

Flames creep under twigs,
prance around branches,
leap, crimson-gold;
dance,
out-of-step.
Smoke curls,
puffs, streaming,
gusting, sweeping.

The prophet's eyes smart,
nostrils burn.
Flames jump, licking,
devouring, blackening.
Fire fingers upward,
tinges blue-green,
crackles, snaps, crawling;
shooting sparks...

Embers glow,
winking, dying.
Charred coals
smoulder,
spent.



The prophet
lies beside
the great rock;
two suns
bake his skin.

Raven loops
above him,
black wings
graceful;
floating,
waiting.

Two midnights
cool his brow,
stars dance above him.
All about him,
silence.

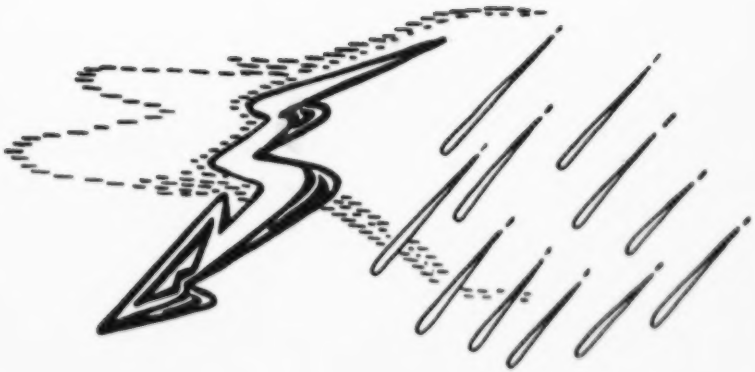
West wind
whispers
through scrub pine,
sighs around
crag rocks;
wooing, taunting, teasing.

Belly rumbles,
tongue swells, dries.
No spit remains
to moisten cracked lips;
no strength left
to lift famished body
from mat brush
beneath him.

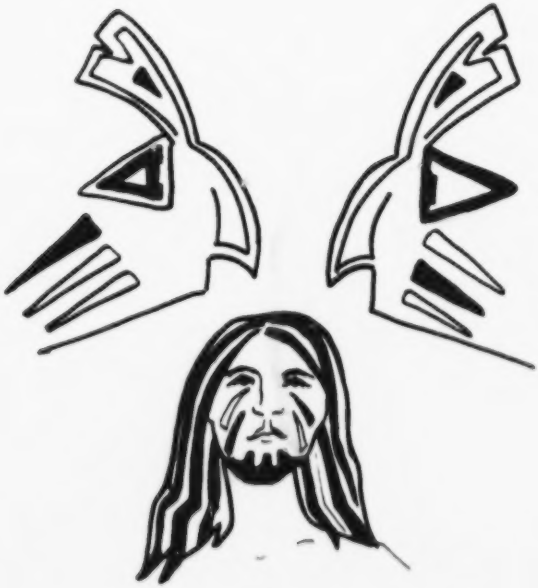
Two suns more
burn his body.
Two midnights more
creep over him;
stars dance around him.
But now
prophet does not see them,
prophet does not feel them.

He lies still,
silent,
on the sacred mountain.
Raven circles above him,
spiraling,
watching,
swooping.

Clouds gather,
clumping, black,
shadowing.
Arrow-light
pierces sky;
thunder-drums beat,
vibrate.
echo sacred mountain.



Sky tears trickle,
fall streaming,
flooding
the gathering darkness.
A pause,
silence.



Then Spirit voice
speaks,
quietly, gently, softly
speaks.

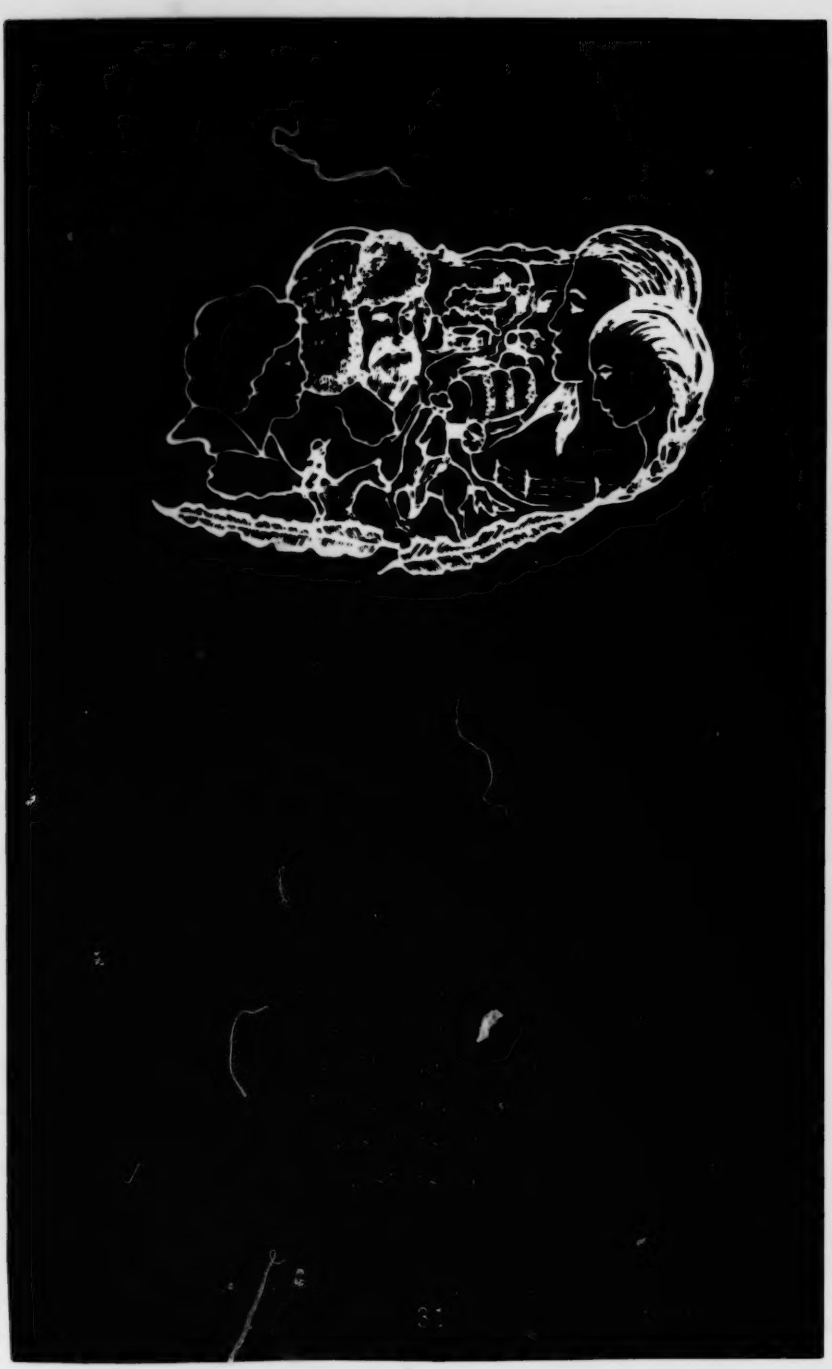
The prophet stirs,
quivers,
blinks against darkness.
Strains to hear, to see
the Spirit
now upon him.

Again
the Spirit voice calls;
the prophet reaches
for medicine pouch,
tries to rise.
Heart beats thump
his ears,
blood surges
his veins.

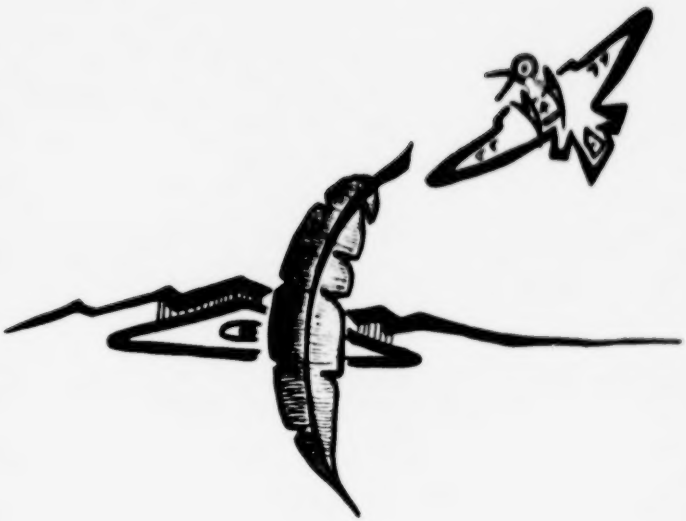
Three times
the Voice
calls him by name.
Louder, clearer
now it comes;
stronger, firmer
now he hears it.

He knows, he knows
the strong medicine
of Spirit power
that holds him,
helpless, trembling
upon the rock
yet fills him with vigor
before not known.

The Vision comes.
He can see
what lies before him,
across the valley below him,
spread like sands below him;
many teepees
four-sided, flat,
shining in the sunlight.



Spirit voice fades,
leaves him
quivering,
trembling.



Dawn streaks above him,
morning sun warms
naked body.
Raven floats above him,
circles, waits;
a single black
feather
floats downward,
settles beside him.

The prophet rises,
runs;
stumbling, falling,
down the sacred mountain
to share his news
with brothers
with his people.

His people listen,
silent, grave.
His people listen
but they do not hear.
His people listen
but they do not understand.

Raven circles,
graceful wings
flutter, flash;
spirals widen.
Raven soars,
breeze-swept;
distant,
fading.

The Vision of the Spokane Prophet

This narrative poem is a legend of the Spokane Indians, telling of the prophet who went to their sacred mountain where a spirit voice revealed to him the future coming of the white man.

The legend was told by Quellquellitzah, a leader of the Spokane tribe, to his daughter, Ella McCarty, who told it to Rebecca Egbert, who recorded it in its present poetic form — a most appropriate form as it recaptures some of the poetic rhythm of the Spokane story teller.